



B2 WORKING GROUP MEETING REPORT

15-10-14

DATE AND VENUE

The GeoparkLIFE B2 Working Group Meeting was held in the Clare County Council Offices, Ennis on Wednesday 15 October, 2014 from 10am to 1pm.

ATTENDANCE

In attendance were: Christine Grant (NMS), Dick Cronin (Clare County Council), Eamon Doyle (Geopark), Emma Glanville (NPWS), Enda Mooney (NPWS), Ken Curley (OPW), John O'Brien (OPW) Gerry Salmon (OPW) and Zena Hctor (consultant). Apologies: Sharon Parr (BFCP).

AGENDA

The agenda set was:

1. Update on B2 work programme progress
2. Review of site reports following the Slieve Carron on-site assessment held on Sept. 3rd
3. Discussion re: significances of site and issues arising
4. Legislation applying to the site and Policy implications
5. Developing a future works programme and monitoring scheme

ITEMS AND DISCUSSION

Item 1: Zena Hctor provided an update on the B2 work progress (report circulated at meeting)

Item 2: Reports with regard to the Slieve Carron site (all reports circulated at the meeting) were delivered as follows:

- Zena Hctor: draft assessment report
- Emma Glanville : Slieve Carran Nature Reserve - NPWS
- Eamon Doyle: Discussion document on visitor impact on the geology at Sliabh Carran Nature Reserve
- Dick Cronin: Measured Survey and Architectural Heritage Appraisal of St Colmán Mac Duach's Oratory
- Christine Grant: Preliminary Archaeological Report on St. McDugh's Hermitage, Keelhilla Nature Reserve

Item 3: Summary Points from the discussion

- Eamon Doyle reported that **visitor counters** have been installed at each of the demonstration sites and are operational. They will need continuous monitoring to ensure that there is no removal of the posts or damage caused. The post at Poul nabrone was interfered with on the day after its installation and had to be reinstated. The issue of erecting the posts at an archaeological site had also been raised with regard to Poul nabrone and the requirement of the presence of an archaeologist when installing the posts. Advice was sought from Gearóid Conroy, NMS, and it is to be positioned in the car park area. Christine Grant and John O'Brien commented that it should be possible to place it further along the access pathway to the site as this area was previously excavated and monitored. Such possibilities need to be checked out.

- The **Coach study** being undertaken by Joe Saunders will be presented at the end of the year in order to allow for the collection of a full years data. The use of such sites as An Rath as short stop points on bus tours of the Burren was discussed and the practice of bus drivers encouraging visitors to walk on the banks at An Rath. It was decided that the Coach study will be very useful in providing information with regard to such practices, how often the sites are being used, the number of visitors, problems of parking and traffic congestion at various sites.
- Increased **promotion of sites** may result in increased visitor numbers and create negative impacts at vulnerable sites. Should the Slieve Carron site for example be signposted? The NPWS policy at present is not to signpost the site but to promote it as part of the package of trail sites within the BNP as a whole through its website. The difference between signage and interpretation needs to be emphasised. It is preferable to have good interpretation at each site and the current interpretation needs to be reviewed and a planned approach developed with the NPWS to provide good quality interpretation which will also incorporate all the access and safety issues relevant to the site (as detailed in the access section below)
- The proposed development of **interpretation** for the sites, in cooperation with the NPWS and all other agencies will need to consider the issue of branding and the incorporation of all partners' logos. The need for bi-lingual content (English and Irish) should have a set standard for the Irish language e.g. the use of placenames – need an acceptable standard and uniform use throughout the region. Translator services should be of a very high standard and preferably native speakers.
- **Access** The issue of universal access needs to be explored for each of the sites. The Geopark have begun a process with the Brothers of Charity group and produced a U-tube video highlighting the findings. This group could be included in further study at the demonstration sites. Ken Curley recommended a planned approach to the issue using the existing process of Access Audit and the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Principles and practices (VSCG) recommendations on grading of trails and safety issues. It is likely that current access will not need physical upgrading at some of the sites - but more likely information with regard to the level of suitability of the trail for various users will need to be supplied at the initial access point (e.g. through the interpretive methods to be developed). An Access audit would first examine all the obstacles on a trail and subsequently these could be approached from a universal access viewpoint. Enda Mooney stated that the NPWS commissioned an access audit for Coole Park in 2013 by the National Trials Office and this methodology is to be rolled out to other National Parks. He suggested that maybe this methodology could be used by the GeoparkLIFE project as part of the NPWS partner contribution

With regard to immediate access into the archaeological site at Slieve Carron, Christine Grant identified the need to enhance the access without interfering with the monument. Stones that are part of the current access area have collapsed over time and in the main are presently set into the ground, so that safety has improved in the recent past. She stated that there will be no need to remove stones and emphasised the need to think about access in terms of the overall site and the overall Burren environment as rocky and sometimes wet. Our access information should therefore be presented with these conditions in mind. We t need to determine when something becomes a health and safety issue in this light and then apply this understanding when dealing with access at all the sites. Any ruined site has its hazards and visitors must be informed and prepared for this. With regard to any interventions needed these must be of minimum disturbance and monitored over time. For example, the removal of trees around MacDuagh's church in the past has improved the underfoot condition of the site but this hasn't been monitored and recorded.

The agreed recommendations made for an initial intervention to improve the access to the church site at Slieve Carron was the coppicing back of the hazel at the pinch point entrance in Spring 2015 and monitoring over the following year.

When the question of whether this would result in changing the aesthetics of the site was raised, opinions were expressed that the site was much more open in the past and the hazel will regrow within 5 years and so the current aesthetics can be reinstated, if the future planned monitoring indicates that this intervention did not result in a resolution of the problem. If a formal path is required following monitoring of the coppice intervention, this path should be of minimum width and will need approval from NMS. The NPWS experience of gravel paths laid in the meadow area is that the vegetation creeps back overtime and has been very successful in containing the footfall.

It was agreed that any interventions to be made at any of the demonstration sites will need to find a balance that suits all opinions. Everyone's perspective needs to be valued and the approach should always be of minimal intervention. Monitoring will be extremely important and must be planned carefully. The proposed path monitoring survey (to be developed with the NPWS for all trails) will provide information with regard to the impact of trampling on the various habitats and this will be transferable to each of the demonstration sites and further within the Burren.

- **Archaeological Monuments** at Slieve Caron. Christine Grant presented her preliminary survey of the site. The most vulnerable aspects of the site at present from an archaeological perspective are the church and the well. She identified the need to carry out a more in-depth baseline condition report. This will define the extent of the boundary, safety issues and current access. It will determine the GPS co-ordinates for each of the large number of monuments which are located within a very confined area, resulting in the exact locations from which fixed point photography monitoring can be continued in the future and from which a scaled plan of the site can be developed. Christine is seeking quotations for condition reports for both the Slieve Carron and Blackhead archaeological sites and the work should be completed by early 2015.
- **Ownership** of the Slieve Carron site. A folio search revealed that the defined monuments are within the NPWS Reserve and therefore in the ownership of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Two fields in front of MacDuagh's church site are in private ownership with a burden for archaeological excavation. The current access to the church site is through these fields. Christine Grant stated that these fields may be the site of the graveyard, as its exact location is presently unconfirmed. Christine is to investigate this further as it is an issue that needs to be cleared by the National Monuments Service, along with the extent of the surrounding boundary of the church site and the inclusion of currently unrecorded monuments onto the Record of Monuments and Places. All of this information will be included in the proposed condition report and will incorporate the whole demonstration site on both sides of the road – the Nature Reserve and the BNP section. The NPWS will supply a map showing the boundary for the BNP lands within the Slieve Carron demonstration site.
- **Future Management and Maintenance of Church site** As the church site is currently owned by the Department, the possibility of the OPW taking over the management and maintenance of the site as part of their portfolio was discussed. The OPW partners are to explore this possibility further. The forthcoming NMS condition report will add to this discussion and the outcome will determine if the OPW will be responsible for the carrying out of detailed conservation work on the monuments.
- **Mortar training workshops** In tandem with the preparation of the NMS Condition Report, the OPW will take mortar samples from both MacDuagh's Church and Carran Church. These will be analysed and a substitute synthetic mortar produced. A workshop will be organised at the Athenry depot possibly in Spring 2015 (date to be determined).
- **Initial interventions** The NPWS operatives can undertake the coppicing of the hazel in early Spring 2015 and the need for tree surgery on a Willow tree that overhangs the Church will need to be determined especially in light of a Lichen survey which was carried out here (to be sourced from Sharon Parr)
- **Architectural condition:** Dick Cronin expressed his concern with regard to the architectural fragments which are scattered around the Church site, as recorded in his report. He also highlighted the precarious nature of the narrow flagstone which is currently supporting the east gable. Dick offered to revise the drawings in his report to indicate O'Donovan measurements for the church.
- **Votive offerings on site** Discussion with regard to the presence of an increasing number of votive offerings on the trees adjacent to the well and up to the cave indicated differing opinions. They included: that all offerings should be removed as the site has no historical precedence of this activity; possibly put up signage to discourage the activity and that some of this activity is genuine and we must respect this. The presence of a steel Cross on the site was also discussed, its former location on top of one of the penitential stations and how long it had been on the site. NMS Photos for mid-90s show the cross on the penitential station. It was suggested that information should be sought locally as to when

the last pattern day was held and the origins of the cross. Further consultation to be undertaken at the Pilgrims workshop planned for Saturday 18th October. .

Item 4: Legislative requirements – there may be a need for a screening report for the site in the future dependant on the work to be undertaken. Need to discuss this further when the work programme is finalised.

Item 5: Agreed Workplan

- Christine Grant to commission condition reports for Slieve Carron and Blackhead sites which will inform the future monitoring programme
- OPW to discuss possible inclusion of MacDuagh Church site on their portfolio. If responsibility is transferred to the OPW they will then undertake the future management and monitoring of the monument.
- OPW to obtain mortar samples and plan workshop (connection with B3 working group)
- NPWS to provide boundary map for BNP section of Slieve Carron site
- NPWS to organise coppicing of hazel at access area to Church in Spring 2015 and tree surgery requirements for Willow overhanging the Church. These interventions will then be monitored throughout the following year in terms of their impact.
- Work programme to be developed with NPWS on interpretation
- Monitoring work programme to be developed with NPWS on Path survey

Next meeting

The next working group meeting was provisionally set for **Wednesday Dec 3rd (10am - 1pm)**. Contact to be made with members previous to the date to determine the amount of work completed and the requirements for a meeting.